

Seattle Police Email Community Newsletter

January 24, 2012



Dear Community Friends,

Residential burglaries are a problem. While statistically, the burglary rates haven't varied that much from year to year city-wide, some neighborhoods have been impacted more than others. And when it comes right down to it, it doesn't matter what the stats say when the burglary has happened to you or your neighbor. We want to pass on some trends we're noting regarding residential burglary and some prevention and response measures you can take.

The Trends

Burglars Are Concerned About Who Can See Them

First, when burglars come in to an area and are looking for that home to break in to, they look to see if anyone notices them. So if you see someone in the neighborhood looking around at who may be looking at them, take note and watch what they do. Slowly walking down the street is not illegal; slowly walking down the street looking around at who may be looking at them is suspicious.

Burglars Tend To Select Homes That Appear Unoccupied

If they see that there are no cars parked out front, or if all the homes on the block have their curtains open except for one, or that all the trash cans are back from the curb on collection day except for one, these are indicators that that particular home may be unoccupied at that moment.

Burglars Select Homes That Appear Easy To Break Into

Is someone home? How exposed is the home? How easily can I be seen by neighbors? Does it look like there are ways in without being seen?

Burglars Often Work In Groups

Often there will be two, three, or even more burglars who break in to a house. Often one of the group will knock on the door or ring the bell to see if anyone is home, while the rest of the group hangs back. If someone does answer the door, the person gives some explanation why s/he is there ("Do you have a gas can?" "Oh, I thought this was Jimmy's place", "Have you seen my dog?"). Knowing that someone is home, the group leaves; they do not try to make entry in to that home. Conversely, if after knocking or ringing the bell, they get no answer, the group will look for a way in, often going to an area of the home not as visible to the neighbors. They will kick in a door, throw a rock through a window or a sliding glass door, or often just lift open an unlocked window, using a recycle bin to boost themselves up to reach the window. We have responded to many attempted burglary events where the homeowner was present but did not respond to the door when someone was knocking, only to find a moment later someone trying to break in, or seeing someone skulking outside the home. Once the would-be burglars realized someone was home, they fled.

Young Women Increasingly Involved In Burglaries

We're seeing a trend of young women increasingly being involved in burglaries. It may be a young lady who goes to the door to see if anyone is home while the others hang back. Just this past week while finishing up a home security assessment with a neighbor, she and I saw a young lady on the porch of the house next door, and a vehicle with other people that started to slowly drive away once they noticed us. Knowing the young woman didn't live at that address, the neighbors asked "Can we help you?" The young woman asked if we had a gas can and began to walk off the porch. When we replied no, she walked away; when she was asked where her car was if she needed gas, she pointed the opposite direction of where she was walking. The young woman eventually ran to catch up to the car with the other people in it and they fled the area. The neighbor called 911 to give a description of the suspicious circumstances, the girl and the car. Responding officers informed the neighbor that her being present deterred a burglary.

Home Safes

Increasingly, small home safes, like fire safes which can be easily carried by one person, have been stolen in burglaries. By having a home safe, you are saying to the bad guys, "Look no further; all my important stuff is right here." If you have or are considering a home safe, consider one that is substantial in weight (couple hundred pounds) or bolted down, not one that can be carried away with little effort by one person.

Things You Can Do

Know Your Neighbors

When you know who lives in your neighborhood, you have a better sense of when a stranger is on your block. The reason the neighbor (mentioned above) knew that young lady didn't live at that house is because the neighbors knew each other. It doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone on your block; but have a sense of who lives there, what cars they drive, what school age children live on the block, and so on.

Take A Look Around

When you are out and about in your neighborhood or elsewhere, take a moment to look and note what and who is around. As you walk out your door, or as you are coming back, take a moment to scan your surroundings.

The Power Of Hello

When you see your neighbors, wave and say "Hi." Acknowledge each other. When you see people you don't know on your block, wave and say "Hi." Acknowledge them, too. Send the message that you are engaged in your neighborhood and that you are attentive to what is going on and who is around. People who want to break into homes don't want to be noticed. If they are noticed, they can be identified.

Answer The Door; Doesn't Mean Open The Door

If you are home and someone comes to your door, answer the door. Let them know someone is home. That does not mean open the door. Talk to the person through the door. Let them know someone is home. Ask who is it and what they want. Tell them you're not interested. Do not disclose personal information and use "We" messages instead of "I" message ("We" are not interested. "We" can't come to the door right now." Leave the info on the porch and "we" will get it later. Now is not a good time for "us.") Don't worry about being rude; it is about your safety and the security of your home, not their feelings. Only open the door for those you know. Be able to identify who is on the other side of the door before you open it by looking through a peephole, a window or otherwise.

You may not even need to be verbal; we've seen reports where once the person knocking at the door realized that someone was home (the person inside "knocked" back), the person outside ran to a waiting car and they left the area.

Call 911

If you see a person, vehicle or activity that is suspicious, do not hesitate to call 911. The more you know your neighbors, the more you know what is normal for your block, then better able you are to recognize those things and activities that seem out of place. You are not wasting the police officer's time or tying up the 911 system by calling in suspicious activity; that is what the system is for. Please us it. It's how officers know what and who to look for and what activity is happening. You don't tell us, we don't know; you don't call us, we don't show.

Take Steps To Improve Your Home Security

- Start by closing and locking all doors and windows when you are away from home, even for short periods of time.
- Prune back shrubbery to reduce any hiding spots that might make it possible for a burglar to try to gain entry through a door or window without being seen.
- Ensure you have dead bolt locks on all exterior doors and 3"-4" long screws in the stick plates of your locks. The longer screws make it more difficult to force open a properly locked door when the deadbolt is engaged.
- Use dowels or Charlie bars for sliding glass windows or doors.
- Secure tools and ladders so they can't be used to gain entry to your home or the home of a neighbor.

My Crime Prevention colleagues and I provide free home and business security assessments. If you are interested in having us evaluate your home or business security and make recommendations for improvement, please contact us. If you do not have a block watch, we are available to help you get one going. If you have an existing block watch but haven't gotten together for a while, we can be of service in that area as well.

Thank you for all you do for your neighborhoods. Until next time, Take Care and Stay Safe!

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